

Born in her backyard, *India Blue ZF* is now the top mount of Canada's Julia Tops



Tani Zeidler and her daughter, Julia Tops, with one of their homebreds, *India Blue ZF*.

JUMP MEDIA

GROWING TOGETHER: JULIA TOPS AND THE ZEIDLER FARM BREEDING PROGRAM

By Emily Riden

Young Canadian show jumping athlete Julia Tops has ridden numerous talented mounts over the course of her 20 years, and the ones that have grown up in her own backyard are among the most special.

Just over a decade ago, Julia's mother, Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran Tani Zeidler, launched a breeding program at the family's Zeidler Farm. The homebreds live with Tani and Julia at their home in Calgary, Alberta, just a few minutes down the road from the world-famous Spruce Meadows venue. Consequently, Julia and the young horses have grown up side by side; her

top mount, *India Blue ZF*, was born when Julia was just eight years old.

"It's such an enjoyable experience," said Julia, whose father is Dutch Olympic gold medalist and founder of the Longines Global Champions Tour, Jan Tops. "It takes a long time to develop a connection with a horse. Especially when you're growing up as a junior, you tend to only have a horse for a certain amount of time, unless you're fortunate enough to find that nice one that you can continue to move up with. The breeding program became my solution to that."

After years of patience, learning the ins-and-

outs of the young horses, and hoping that the investment of both time and money would pay off, Tani and Julia are now both reaping the rewards. At present, several of the young horses, including eight-year-old *Lady Margaret ZF* (*Cardento x Iroko*), seven-year-old *Zinnia ZF* (*For Pleasure x Iroko*), and six-year-old *Miquelon ZF* (*Calvados IV x Igor de Vauptain*), and are successfully competing under young professional, Nick Dello Joio.

Julia's star mount, however, is *India Blue ZF*, an 11-year-old mare by *Mr. Blue* and one of the very first Zeidler Farm offspring. Training under U.S. Olympic bronze medalist Norman Dello Joio, the pair has most recently been competing in the High Amateur-Owner Jumper division in Wellington, Florida, with great success, thanks in part to their special bond.

"I remember when 'Apple' wouldn't drink her mother's milk so we had to bottle-feed her, and now she's my best horse!" said Julia of *India Blue ZF*. All the fillies born in the Zeidler Farm breeding program are nicknamed after fruit, while all the colts are nicknamed after vegetables (yes, there is even a Broccolini!).

"Having that kind of connection makes it all the better," continued Julia, who balances showing with her second year of studying Inter-

national Relations at the University of Toronto's Trinity College. "I have a blast riding her. It doesn't matter if I have a bad day and I miss, or if sometimes things don't work out, I still have the time of my life riding her. I think it's greatly to do with the fact that I grew up with her. We learned pretty much everything together."

For Tani, there's something extra-special about seeing her daughter partnered with her homebreds.

"The horses live with me at home; they are with me from birth on," said Tani. "I ride them, I train them, and am very much a part of what they do. It's like having a child. When I put Julia on one, I can't even tell you how emotional it is!"

While being heavily involved in the breeding program's daily operation comes with understandable emotional attachment, it also gives Tani unique insight into each of the horses she has bred.

"The one thing that really makes it work is that I know them so well," explained Tani, who combines her intimate knowledge of the horses with her own show ring experience to work in the animals' best interest. "If Julia calls and says, 'Mom, the course is really big!' I can tell her or

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Several horses bred by Zeidler Farm are competing under Nick Dello Joio including *Lady Margaret ZF*, pictured here competing at the 2016 Hampton Classic Horse Show in New York.

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Nick not to worry, that particular horse can handle it. I know if the horse is fine or if they need to pull back.

“When you go to Europe and you buy a horse, like I have done many times over the years, you spend so much time getting to know it and figuring it out,” continued Tani. “It is very different knowing one from birth; I know everything about their personalities. One of the best parts about the breeding program is that when I sell one, I can say to the new owner “this is everything about it”.”

Likewise, Julia knows *India Blue ZF* like the back of her hand and hopes that their special partnership will allow them to progress throughout this year’s Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF) season in Wellington, Florida. And while Julia and Nick Dello Joio may be the ones showing the Zeidler Farm horses this season, Julia is quick to credit her mother for the opportunity.

“My mom has done a really great job, and she’s really humble about it,” Julia said. “Both my parents are great horse people, and it has been especially inspiring to see my mom create a legacy through our homebreds. It’s been really great to watch her vision and her dream come

true. I’m very proud of her.”

For Tani, success for her homebreds comes in many forms. While it’s a thrill to watch the young horses develop and take their first steps into the show ring, it’s also fulfilling when they move on to new homes.

“It’s like having a child; you want them to do well and be successful, no matter where they end up,” said Tani. “I don’t

care if they want to jump or do dressage; I just want the best for them.”

The Zeidler family has found a recipe for developing successful mounts, and many more products of the Zeidler Farm breeding program are sure to be seen in the show ring for years to come. *✶*

To learn more about Julia Tops and the Zeidler Farm breeding program, visit www.zeidlerfarm.com.